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## Rehoboth gets its beach back

**Engineers hustle to complete replenishment by July 1**

By MOLLY MURRAY / The News Journal  
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REHOBOTH BEACH -- Rocky Rourk's Memorial Day trip to Rehoboth Beach came with an unwelcome surprise.

The stretch of sand the Crofton, Md., resident has been visiting since the mid-1970s had withered to a fraction of what it was.

"I don't ever recall seeing it this short," she said.

Years of battering waves and strong ocean currents had cut so deeply into parts of the beach near Rehoboth Avenue and to the north that there was hardly room left for sunbathers.

"We didn't have any beach 2 1/2 weeks ago," said Rehoboth Beach City Manager Gregory Ferrese. "We had about 15 feet of beach at high tide."

That all will be a memory if Rourk returns for the July 4 weekend.

By then, a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers contract dredging crew will have completed the bulk of the work rebuilding both Rehoboth's and Dewey's beaches.

Spot work building pedestrian crossings over the protective dunes will remain, and crews will return in the fall to plant beach grass to help stabilize the dunes.

Independence Day beachgoers can expect to find an expanse of sand from the dunes to the surf that is three or four times as wide as last year.

It will be a beach that will take some getting used to, if the Dewey Beach experience is a model, said Dewey's Mayor Pat Wright. The reconstruction of Dewey's beach began in February and was finished in late May.

"I'm so happy, I can't begin to tell you," Wright said. "We're having to adjust to having a beach again."



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Dredge pipes are stacked on Rehoboth's beach Monday in preparation for the next phase of sand replenishment.



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An aerial view taken Sunday shows the status of the sand replenishment at Rehoboth Beach. When the project is completed, the beach in town will be about four times as wide as it was last season.

The corps' dredging and sand-spreading equipment moved to Rehoboth just after Memorial Day weekend, and has been in operation around the clock to get the job done before the July 4 weekend, which is when the summer season in the resort communities really kicks into high gear.

Anthony P. Pratt, the state's shoreline administrator, said he and John Hughes, the secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control and a former mayor of Rehoboth Beach, sat down with the dredging company before the project started.

"We made up a game plan," he said. "We wanted to make sure the area was done where there is the most demand for the beach."

The first area to be tackled was the area immediately north and south of Rehoboth Avenue and the stretch of beach at the northern end of the boardwalk in front of several of the city's large oceanfront hotels.

In coming days, the equipment and crews will begin work to the south -- an area where erosion was less devastating and the beach was wider and healthier.

"Our preference was we would be long gone by now," Pratt said.

Bad weather, a delay in securing federal money to finish the project and a recent plug in the sand-pumping lines combined to delay the project, he said.

### **A long time coming**

The project has been more than a decade in the making, with the federal government funding 65 percent of the work and the state paying for the rest.

The contractor is taking a million cubic yards of sand from a bar off Indian River Inlet and pumping it onto the beaches. Bulldozers move ahead of the pumping to push sand to the west to build dunes up to about 16 feet high. The broader beach and higher dunes are designed to provide greater protection from ocean storms.

Pratt said visitors now will have to walk 75 feet from the edge of the boardwalk to get to the end of the dune and flat sand. After that, the beach will extend about 175 feet to the water, he said.

Rehoboth's beach also will be much higher than in recent years. In some areas, a layer of sand four to six feet deep will be added, he said.

Carol Everhart, executive director of the Rehoboth Beach-Dewey Beach Chamber of Commerce, said the beach is "massive" and the work has been "fast. We've had very full weekends."

But not all Rehoboth residents are happy with the size of the beach.

Dian Stein, who lives on Grenoble Place, said she can't get over how much bigger Dewey's renourished beach is compared with the finished product in Rehoboth.

"Did they think we weren't going to notice?" she said. "It's almost ridiculous."

### **More beach in Dewey**

Dewey's new beach is considerably broader -- somewhere in the neighborhood of 300 feet wide, Pratt said. But that is by design.

With the natural flow of currents moving sand from south to north, Rehoboth will benefit over time from some of the extra sand placed on Dewey's beach, which is about a mile south of Rehoboth.

The only complaints now being heard in Dewey come from people whining about "how far it is to walk from the dune to the beach," Everhart said.

Rehoboth sunbathers will find that the beach is not only wider, it's heavier underfoot. The sand chosen for the work has a coarser grain, which officials think will resist erosion better than the finer sand visitors may be accustomed to.

"It's a much heavier beach," said Dewey Beach motel owner and local attorney Harold E. Dukes. Some people have complained, he said, but he thinks it will hold up better.

The beach is so wide "you've got a playing field out there now," he said.

### **Period of adjustment**

Wright said Dewey lifeguards have had to adjust where they put their stands and also figure out where beachgoers can set up for volleyball and other sports. Some of those activities were restricted when the beach was much smaller, he said.

The Rehoboth Beach Patrol already is trying to anticipate

how the new beach will impact their operations.

"It kind of gives us more beach to guard," said Kent Buckson, captain of the patrol. The old natural barriers, such as jetties, are now covered with a thick layer of sand. The guards will have some help navigating the newfound wide-open spaces, however.

The city bought a specialized four-wheel-drive vehicle to help move injured people across the wider beach, Buckson said.

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